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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, November 19, 1941

Subject: "BETTER HOME LIGHTING." Information from rural electrification experts of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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We're getting into that season of the year when the nights are growing longer and good lighting at home is becoming more important. So today here are some tips from rural electrification experts of the U. S. Department of Agriculture to help you get more comfort and enjoyment from the electric lights in your home, and also to help you save money on lighting.

The experts suggest that you always think of electric light in terms of measure. Just as you think of wheat in bushels, and water in gallons, so you buy and use electric light in watts or kilowatts. A kilowatt, you know, is a thousand watts. Kilo is the Greek word for thousand, that's all. The amount of wattage determines the brightness of your light.

But watts aren't all there is to good lighting. The quality of light counts, too. To avoid eyestrain you want lighting free from glare as well as gloom. You also want to avoid too sharp contrast between bright light and darkness in a room. A drop light in the middle of a room that spotlights a table brightly, but leaves the rest of the room in darkness, is an example of contrast that is hard on the eyes.

In general, lighting experts strive for an even diffusion of light, not too bright, but bright enough for the purpose you need the lights. The workrooms and living rooms in the home--places where the family reads or washes dishes or studies or sews--need brighter light than the dining room or halls or bedrooms.

Most modern fixtures and lamps are designed to give even glare-free light. They often have diffusion bowls of glass or plastic for this purpose. But you can often fix up old lamps so they'll give comfortable as well as good light. Sometimes all a lamp needs is a heavier shade to conceal the lighted bulb. On glaring overhead lights or shower-type fixtures, you can use an inverted cone or plastic bowl. For a one-socket fixture in the ceiling you can buy adapter-type units of glass, metal or plastic at low cost.

But very frequently the light unit is not the cause of the glare. The glare may come from a mirror, a glassed picture, or a bright metal object that catches the light. You can remove the glare by moving the bright object a little. Even a piece of furniture such as a highly polished table top can reflect a dazzling light into the eyes. Another tip--walls and ceilings with a dull or flat finish won't cause as much glare as a glossy finish.

Sometimes you see colored bulbs at the store and think they might be attractive at home. But the experts say they give less light and are therefore more expensive to use. And they tend to distort the appearance and color of your home furnishings.

Hardly any house ever has enough outlets, yet outlets cost very little to install. So when you're wiring a house or making any changes in your present wiring system, be sure to have plenty of outlets in the kitchen, the laundry, and the living room--or wherever you'll want lamps or radios or appliances.

How many lamps or other fixtures should a room have? That depends on the size of the room and the habits of the family. If you place your furniture carefully and choose the right fixtures, a few good lamps will serve the whole family. For example, a floor lamp of adequate height, with a wide shade, may serve one person who is sewing and two persons who are reading. But the usual bridge lamp has a rather narrow shade so that only one person may be able to use it comfortably.

Kitchens and laundries demand good, well-diffused lighting. Usually a central, glare-free white glass overhead-unit is sufficient. But a large kitchen may also require a 60-watt fixture over the sink, range, or work table.

Dining rooms and bedrooms do not call for as much light as the other rooms of the house. But bedrooms need dressing-table lamps placed at about eye level when seated. And a little 7-watt night light in the children's room, the hall or the bathroom, can be a great help.

The bathroom may have a central fixture of the same type as the kitchen. But for greatest convenience, you want glarefree, indirect lighting at the mirror. Two 40-watt fixtures with frosted glass shades are good on either side of the mirror. And some homes now are using fluorescent lighting.

Fluroescent lights, the so-called cold lights, give about 3 times the light of the ordinary incandescent lamp, and burn far longer. But they cost considerably more to install and their use in the home is limited to very modern lamps and to kitchens, workrooms and bathrooms.

One last and very important tip. Make certain that children study and read in good, glarefree light. Almost every teacher had had experience with a seemingly backward child who has trouble in school only because he has to study in a badly lighted room.

That's all the lighting news for today.

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